

**TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
IN OPPOSITION TO GOVERNORS' HB NOS. 6353 & 6354**

March 22, 2013

***Statement of Anthony J. Castagno, Chair
State Elections Enforcement Commission***

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Commission. Thank you for your consideration of the State Elections Enforcement Commission's views on these bills. I also want to thank this committee for its assistance throughout this process. I am Anthony Castagno, Chairman of the State Elections Enforcement Commission.

There is a reason why budgetary independence for watchdog agencies is necessary: watchdog agencies have to regulate, and sometimes investigate, elected public officials, including those in the executive branch.

Bill 6353 proposes to take away our budgetary independence. It removes our control over much of our resources as well, but perhaps most troubling is that, when combined with Bill 6354, it puts most of the SEEC's resources under the control of an agent of the Governor, answerable only to the Governor, one of the elected officials we are charged with regulating.

Currently the power to decide which election-related complaints are docketed or initiated, to conduct investigations, to prioritize and direct resources to individual matters and to resolve all enforcement matters rests with the SEEC's independent, nonpartisan Commission. This bill would change all that and create the perception – and certainly allow the reality – of politicizing this process. It would cripple the ability of SEEC to do its job and result in a loss of public trust in our legislators' commitment to a transparent political process that will not tolerate corruption.

The SEEC is an efficient, highly regarded agency that serves important governmental functions: safeguarding the political process, monitoring campaign finance, and enforcing against election law violators. In a national study, SEEC was identified as "one of the three most effective in the U.S." in enforcing election law and improving campaign finance laws. (*Eagleton Institute of Politics* at Rutgers University). Regarding campaign finance, as you all know, the SEEC also runs the highly successful public financing program, the Citizens Election Program, which received an "A" (96%) in Public Financing, the highest grade awarded of all states in that category (*State Integrity Investigation*, a joint project of the Center for Public Integrity, Global Integrity and Public Radio International.) .

After three election cycles, the CEP process has become very efficient. We have learned how to do more with less and absorbed a 40% cut in staff over the past 2 years. Currently, we are at rock bottom levels for maintaining the extensive IT infrastructure and dedicated personnel required to process and award grants, to ensure compliance with complex election laws, and to enforce sanctions against those who would do wrong. Our elected officials and the citizens of Connecticut have confidence in the current system, confidence earned through years of legislative support for the SEEC and a clear and open process not subject to political interference.

The proposed budget will take what is working well, working efficiently, and pull it apart without regard to the actual day-to-day job functions of the staff.

Why dismantle our agency when there are no real savings to be gained and we put at significant risk all that is being accomplished by the SEEC?

That really is the question here.

Removing most, if not all of the attorneys, the IT staff, fiscal staff and the elections officers, would cripple the agency. These aren't functions that can be off-sited, or moved to another support agency that serves eight or nine other agencies, or handled by generalists who are not conversant with elections law.

Removing independent oversight of the SEEC on top of all this is simply a bad idea and not in the interests of the citizens and legislators of Connecticut. I urge you to reject this proposal and keep the State Elections Enforcement Commission independent, intact and at the service of the people of Connecticut.

Thank you.